

Layout

'Each time a page is turned, a curtain rises to reveal a fresh scene.'

Jim Aitchison in *Cutting Edge Advertising*

'I have always loved working with words and images – actors on a stage – evoking emotions. It's theater, really.'

Michael Schwab, quoted by Rudolph Reitber in *Step Inside Design*, vol. 22, no. 2, March/April 2006

'Much like the wardrobe mistress behind the scenes of a play who at the last minute may be found straightening a tie, adding feathers to a hat, or tying a colorful sash, the graphic designer has been regarded as someone who adds a bit of spice to the scene of a text.'

Karen A Schriver in *Dynamics in Document Design*

'What is a design palette? The mix of basic ingredients – typefaces, photographs, illustrations, and a color scheme – that, in the designer's opinion, represent a distinctive mood or style.'

Chuck Green, *Ideabook.com*, 11 March 2005

A layout is really a piece of abstract art. You're fiddling with basic shapes in different tones and trying to get them to sit comfortably, logically and interestingly together in order to tell a story and impart information clearly. As with any abstract composition, the aim is to lead the viewer's eye around the piece, and entertain it with repetition (patterns and texture), contrast (scale, tone and colour), and direction (created through the interaction of shapes and lines).

If you can reduce text and photos, headlines and subtitles, pull-quotes, captions and logos (these are all called 'elements') to their basic shapes, and the tone or colour that those shapes have, it is easier to create an effective layout. The interaction of the basic tones and shapes (including their unity – or similarity to each other – and their proximity or positioning in relation to each other) is what creates the 'layout'.

But page design is not an accident determined by how the text is given to you, what photographs or illustrations the author has supplied or considered appropriate, and how you put it together in an abstract composition. The 'accident' needs to be arranged to lead a reader through it, so a good designer relates pieces of the puzzle to one another until the connections are visually communicated as well as being textually discussed.

Errors of alignment can occur when the designer has not read and understood the text. For example, pictures might be scaled to sizes that distort their logical relationship and confuse the reader. If elements are grouped together without a logical relationship, the reader will seek to relate them to one another and possibly distort the message that was intended. Ensure that you group elements in a page design appropriately. While accidental cross-readings can be fashionable, intriguing and diverting, they tend to limit communication clarity.

In layout, you make choices about the positioning of the elements (imagery, text and space) of the design. The variables are then brought into play.

Images can be square-cut, free-form or soft-edged. Text can be *display text* such as titles and featured type; *body copy*, which is the bulk of the textual content; or short text bursts such as headings, captions and pull-quotes. Space can be placed in bands, e.g. margins around the perimeter of the page, gutters that run between columns, or text drops where an invisible line runs across the layout from which text is hung. Space can also be free-form.

You make decisions at each stop of the way about specific placement and details such as colour, weight and size. But it can be a bit hit and miss. The quick way to make these sorts of decisions – to work every time – is to look underneath it all, behind the actual to the implied. There is an invisible layout structure that enables some layouts to succeed better than others.

Many people are too concerned with getting the obvious correct, concentrating on text details such as punctuation, the positioning of picture credits and colour balance in images. But these do not of themselves create a good layout. The details need to be correct but not at the expense of the success of the piece – after all, if people don't notice the piece, they don't get the opportunity to admire the detail!

The relationship between certain elements should be maintained throughout a layout. For example, you should treat and place captions in the same way throughout and keep spacing around headings constant. This consistency will help readers to decode the message without distraction.

DOING IT SMARTER

Design file

Keep a file of interesting design approaches and techniques that you have photocopied from advertisements, magazines and books or printed off the Internet. Refer to the file when you know you need a particular result but have either run out of time or momentarily lost your inspiration.

DOING IT CHEAPER

Don't bleed

When ink prints off the side of a sheet of paper it is said to 'bleed'. This means that the sheet of paper that is printed needs to be bigger to accommodate the image that continues off the page, and the space around that image that is necessary for the printer to get the page through the printing press. This produces waste and means you have to purchase a larger and therefore more expensive sheet than you need.

Create a design that fits comfortably inside the border with 10 mm of blank space – that is, no ink – on the same edge on both sides of the sheet of paper. This is called the gripper edge. On the other three edges, 3–5 mm clearance is sufficient.



The subtle distortions of the text blocks in this layout reiterate the shapes of the illustrations, creating a relationship between the text and images that brings unity and logic to the composition.

Client: University of Virginia

Publication: *Art from the Land: Dialogues with the Kluge–Ruhe Collection of*

Australian Aboriginal Art edited by Howard Morphy and Margo Smith Boles

Design: Maureen MacKenzie-Taylor

Studio: Msquared Research Assisted Design

Hanging your text from a chosen line – like washing – also achieves this. It is better that the relationships between elements (that you have decided will best suit the reader's requirements) are maintained, than that the columns fall to the same depth, for example.

And don't forget the underlying layer – the layout is the abstract composition that is the aesthetic basis of your design. There are potential distractions in this 'invisible' layer, too.

To demonstrate the implications of even simple decisions, take a blank A4 sheet of paper and type a line of text in the centre of the page. This line of text creates a number of implied or invisible lines and shapes within the page:

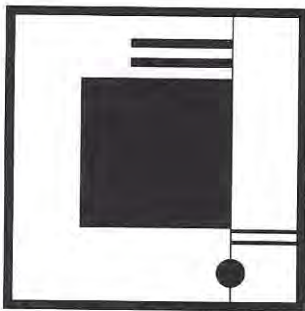
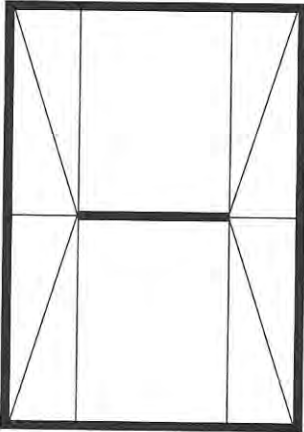
- An invisible line runs through the text to the left-hand edge of the page and similarly from the end of the text to the right-hand edge of the page, dividing the page into two segments.
- Those two segments are two implied rectangles.
- At the beginning of the text is an implied vertical line connecting the first letter of the text to the top and bottom edges of the page.
- Similarly, at the end of the text there is another implied vertical, which connects the top and bottom edges of the page through the last letter.
- These verticals further divide the page area into invisible shapes – you now have six rectangles implied.

Part of the reason that these verticals and horizontals are so strong is that the edges of the page create vertical and horizontal stress or at least conform to it; in a different shape, the implications may be different. There is an even more subtle tension that can be a further complication to exploit in your layout – the diagonals connecting the beginning and end points of the text line to the two corners closest to them.

So the placement of one line of text can create this amount of clutter! Can you see why playing about with many elements becomes so difficult?

One way to ease the resulting angst is to limit the numbers of implied lines and shapes, by using the same ones many times, instead of creating new ones at each introduction of a new element. This strengthens the layout.

The secret formula to successful layout – particularly in poster and cover design – is to limit the number of vertical



One vertical division can perform many roles

and horizontal divisions of the space. Let the same line do a few jobs. It could:

- be the edge of the title block
- be a picture's border
- be where the author's name runs from
- point to the publisher's logo at the foot of the page.

The last point here also introduces the concept of implied direction. Lines can be said to direct us or 'move' to the right and down, due to our understanding of standard eye flow.

Eye flow

It may seem obvious, but, in the West, we sometimes forget that we read from top to bottom and from left to right. Therefore, at whatever point we enter a layout, we automatically continue to the right and down.

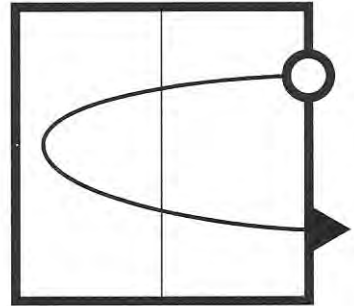
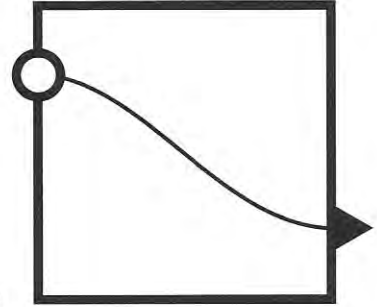
In the East, there is reading from top to bottom and right to left.

In either the West or the East, it is a contrary movement to go 'backwards'.

In the West, backwards is either reading up from the bottom to the top or backwards from the right to the left. This is why captions are expected to be at the bottom or to the right of photographs or illustrations.

That is not to say that our eyes are not tempted back to other areas of the layout. But be careful to avoid too many 'backward' moves in a layout.

In Western double-page spreads, it is understood that the eye travels in a parabolic arc from the top right-hand corner (where the eye follows the double page as revealed by the turning action), across to the far left and back to the exit point at the bottom right. It is suggested, then, that there should be something on the left-hand page that drags your eye fully across the spread. In many magazine feature stories, the left-hand page is a full-page illustration and the title, and the start of the story is on the right-hand page. This follows the standard understanding of hierarchy – the large picture has the most attraction value and, from there, eye flow leads into the headline. It also explains the marketing wisdom that insists that advertisers pay the premium for right-hand page advertising space in magazines and newspapers, because the reader's attention may never get to the left page!



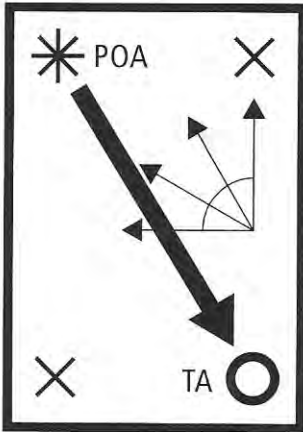
Parabolic curve of entry/exit for double-page spread

In Japanese books, for example, this is exactly the opposite as they are bound on the right and open to read from right to left, so the arc is reversed.

READ MORE ABOUT IT

Colin Wheildon, *Type and layout: How typography and design can get your message across – or get in the way*, Strathmoor Press, Berkeley, 1995, ISBN 0 9624891 5 8.

Timothy Samara, *Design elements: A graphic style manual: Understanding the rules and knowing when to break them*, Rockport Publishing, Beverly, Mass., 2007, ISBN 978-1-59253-261-2.



The Gutenberg diagram

Based on the diagram devised by Edmund Arnold, a US typographer, who described the basic eye flow (shown by the solid arrow) as the Axis of Orientation. The entry point is coded as the Primary Optical Area and the exit point as the Terminal Anchor. Arnold identified two fallow corners with crosses as being dead spots in a layout. Fine arrows in an arc represent the angles within the page that are considered to be backward movements that the eye avoids.

Backward movement

How often do you read backwards? That is, how often do your eyes travel against the assumed eye flow? All the time. As layout designers, harnessing eye flow and understanding how each layout decision you make will affect it is actually what layout 'is', the positioning of elements within a space for impact and effective communication in order.

Understanding that backward movement is natural but contrary to the standard flow enables you to use it more effectively. It is recommended that you limit the amount of backward movement required in a layout, because too much will confuse readers and they'll leave the layout without finishing, missing the communication your client expects them to receive.

On a printout of a layout, draw a line of the journey the reader's eye will make around it. Watch people's eyes as they are reading your work and get an idea where they are looking. Note down the pattern of their glances and see if you can reconstruct it when you are back at your desk with the layout.

Jumping through a layout, the eye goes in order through the pictures from largest to smallest, from most colourful to least colourful, and eventually to the text. You can help this landing on the text by leading the eye in a simple curve – if eye movement continues in the same trajectory, it will hit the start of the text once it has left the smallest image.

Of course, the eye gets interested in an image as well and takes a stroll through the focal points and textures within it. It leaps from flashes of intense colour to a brief exploration of shadow areas, so understanding the interest areas within an image is also necessary. A number of introductory art books will deconstruct an image and the eye flow through it in a discussion of its composition.

The skimming of the reader continues through a layout from elements to elements in a hierarchy and a path. If you are in doubt as you get further down the hierarchy, assume the eye flow from any point to be to the right and down.

This phenomenon is how text can be lost or hidden in plain view. Particular placements can mean the eye will simply not get back to the areas of the layout that are called the 'fallow' areas, unless something extreme is done to attract them there.

Eye flow is one of the difficulties for layered image/text techniques because the eye is not only reading through the imagery, but also reading foreground and background. In many cases, the eye is expected to wander over the same area twice, focusing differently to catch the juxtaposed message (because the image will register first).

If you need to correct eye flow, change the size relationships of your images and alter their alignment. If there is a lot of backward reading, sometimes a mirror image of the layout will correct it – in the same placement relationships, just swap everything on the right to the left.

Spatial relationships

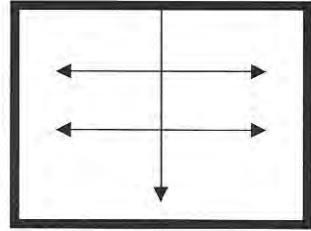
There are numerous compositional concepts to understand, with their own language. They mostly describe opposites. There is the foreground's interaction with the background, called figure/ground and sometimes object/space interaction. Further than this there is the implied dimensionality of foreground, middle ground and background.

There is the interaction of positive and negative or light and dark. Further to them are the mid-tones that can also imply dimensionality (things fade as they recede into the distance).

The language of composition also includes dots, lines and planes.

A dot is considered the smallest possible object but also a focal point, so a circular photograph can be a dot within a layout.

Lines are directional and can have numerous qualities, textures and even be implied or created by joining a series of dots. A line's direction is usually moving out from the centre of a page though a horizontal line, due to eye flow, is usually moving to the right. Backward movement along



Reading on-screen

Readers scan a screen, reading down the centre with a left–right scanning motion. In this way, they can quickly access needed information from short paragraphs, dot point lists, headings, links and graphics.

Four critical relationships in type and image interaction

- 1 Separation (they are independent of each other)
- 2 Fusion (they merge into one entity)
- 3 Fragmentation (they displace, disturb or disrupt each other)
- 4 Inversion (they trade places – where type takes on pictorial properties or image takes on typographic qualities).

Nancy Skolos and Tom Wedell in
Type, Image, Message: A Graphic Design Layout Workshop

Some of Timothy Samara's 20 excellent rules for making good design:

- Have a concept.
- Communicate – don't decorate.
- Speak with one visual voice.
- If you can do it with less, then do it.
- Move it! Static equals dull.
- Look to history, but don't repeat it.
- Be decisive. Do it on purpose – or don't do it at all.

'Rules exist – especially the ones set forth here – as guidelines, based on accumulated experience from many sources. As such, all rules come with exceptions and can be broken at any time, but not without a consequence. The consequence of breaking one rule might mean reinforcing another, and it might mean true innovation ...'

Timothy Samara in *Design Elements: A Graphic Style Manual*

DOING IT SMARTER

Faces

People pictures are most important. Faces are even more important. And the eyes have it! Think of mass-market magazine covers – usually a face with text crowded around it. In extreme close-ups, the eyes are the most beguiling features of the cover.

Even implied faces have attraction. Think about your car: the headlights are the eyes, the grille is a nose and the bumper is the mouth. Does your car smile at you? In layout terms, this subliminal smiling 'face' creation can make strong designs.

a line is possible if it is moving from the dominant focal point to a less dominant focal point.

Planes are created by giving a line dimension. They are also called shapes. The planes can be flat, shaded, textured and can also exist in foreground, middle ground or background.

Dominance

Pictures dominate a layout – and coloured pictures assume more importance than black-and-white ones. If there is a picture in a layout, readers will look at it first. So that's where they land in your layout and their eye flow starts. If it is on a right-hand page, you may have just lost the left-hand page, unless you somehow drag the reader's attention back to the left (in a backward motion). Be aware of the eye's movement through your design: What will it see first and where on the page is it? Does it move logically – using standard eye flow – to the next place or is the eye rushing around awkwardly? Does the eye have a resting spot or somewhere to concentrate for an extended period? Has the eye moved around the page so much that it longs to get out? Has it stopped at all the information points? Does the reader remember what the major pieces of information were? Is the reader enjoying the contrast of details and the overall form?

There are very few examples of designs where pictures do not overpower type. This is the reasoning behind the classic advertising format: a picture at the top, a headline underneath, followed by the body copy, and usually finished with a logo or coupon in the bottom right-hand corner. If the headline was placed above the picture, it may not be noticed because the reader's attention is already further down the page (on the picture).

Simplicity

The value of a 'simple' layout is its strength. This is often a comparative value, because a majority of layouts do not have this simplicity and absolute logic that is achieved through both vertical and horizontal simplicity in the layout. For example, extensive indenting can have the effect of complicating your layout vertically. Review your indents and limit them. The persistence of any element – even

a 5 mm paragraph indent – quickly establishes another ‘invisible’ vertical line, complicating your layout. Each tab has the same effect.

In newsletters, the layout is often complicated horizontally where stories finish at different depths in different columns. Try to have fewer of these ‘invisible’ lines of breaks running across your layout.

The most striking layouts also tend to rely on recognition of basic shapes, such as square, triangle, circle ... These basic shapes need not be obvious. Disguise them through an understanding of implied line and shape. Strengthen the layout by using the standard or pure geometric shapes: circles rather than ovals; squares rather than rectangles or rhombuses; equilateral rather than isosceles triangles.

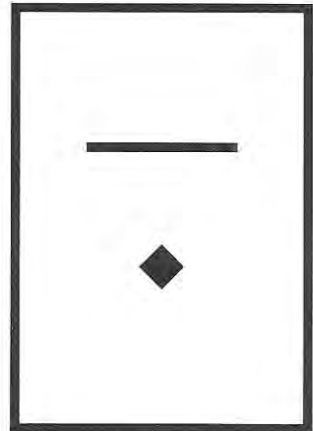
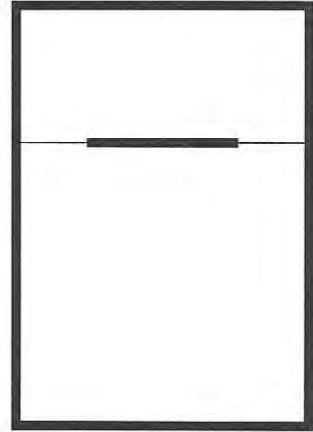
There is another consideration here. The audience will perceive curves and rounded shapes as friendlier than sharp points and crisp lines, which can be seen as harsh. And curves turning upwards at both ends are ‘subliminal’ happy faces.

Let’s go back to our previous example, the placement of one line of text on an A4 page. If you now place that line about one-third of the way down the page, you create an implied rectangle above the line and an implied square below the line. This is a stronger layout option, because the square is a more pure shape than a rectangle.

Then if you placed a logo shaped like a diamond centred about two-thirds of the way down the page, you would create an implied triangle where the logo is connected by invisible threads to the beginning and end of the line of text below. If you then work the spacing between the two elements to create an implied equilateral triangle, you create a stronger layout statement. The diamond-shaped logo would also give you the point of the triangle – super-strength!

But the structural lines within a layout do not have to be parallel only – or even straight! Many successful layouts use irregular shapes and curves, using fewer structural lines and placing elements in harmony with existing curves. Usually, this recognition that you can use an existing structural line instead of creating a new one will improve a layout.

There are meanings implied by design decisions that are purely visually communicated. If you use a design technique thinking it’s simply good to look at without



understanding the visual conventions you have used and what they are saying, you may be communicating incorrect meanings to the reader.

For example, if you bleed something off the page or crop in close to something, you are implying that the image is moving off the page or too large to be contained by the 'frame'. This can be very dramatic.

Graphing conventions used in picture layout will imply the simultaneity of events, creating hybrid visual form of a graphed storyboard. This technique is used in the layouts for snowboarding, surfing and skating magazines to capture some of the spirit and dynamism of those sports, effectively capturing the fourth dimension (time) in the two-dimensional space of a page.



Snowboarder magazine uses graphing and storyboarding techniques to capture the dynamism of snowboarding in a layout style they call a 'sequence pictorial'.

Publisher: Morrison Media Services

Publication: *Snowboarder*

Art director: Graeme Murdoch



Similarly to the implied simultaneity or concurrence of photo layouts using graphing techniques, if you were to run a series of photographs that describe steps in a process, in either a long string across the top of a layout or in a clockwise direction around a layout, they'd better be in the correct order of the process – as the reader will link them. Remember that readers read proximity as having a relationship – either a connection or a juxtaposition of ideas.

For example, in an agricultural magazine, you might illustrate the process of a product from planting, growing, harvesting; to its packing, branding, distribution; and its

appearance in-store, preparation in the kitchen and on the table at home ready to eat. Positioning the captions can be an interesting dilemma, too! Often they will be run together, rather than under each photograph. The caption will start with 'L-R:' meaning 'reading left to right', 'Clockwise from left:' or sometimes have a miniature graphic of the set of images individually numbered.

Type over an image limits its ability to be perceived as a window showing reality. The type anchors the image into the page, limiting its effectiveness. However, you can balance this 'con' with the 'pro' that type over an image also gives greater penetration to the text message.

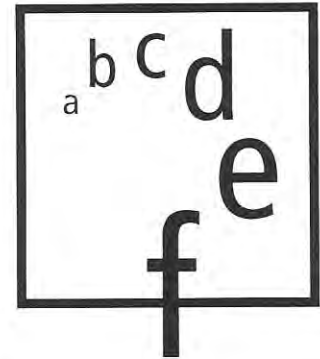
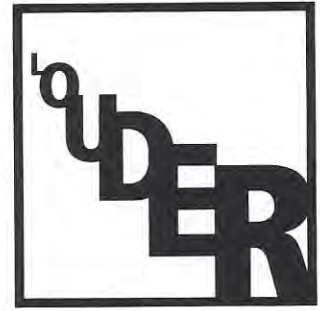
If type starts small and gets larger and darker throughout a line of text, it is akin to musical notation, and the effect is that of a crescendo (getting louder). The opposite is also true – if type gets smaller and fades away, it is mimicking a diminuendo. This can be a volume thing or a 3-D thing – the type could also be seen to be advancing or receding into the distance.

Size and colour also have an impact on where in the visual space we see type and images. If something is smaller, muted or paler, it recedes. If something is larger or brighter, it advances. Anything that overlaps something else implies it is 'forward'.

Another layout technique that is recommended for photo layouts is that of implied storytelling akin to storyboarding.

READ MORE ABOUT IT

- Robin Williams, *The non-designer's design book: Design and typographic principles for the visual novice*, Peachpit Press, Berkeley, 1994, ISBN 1 56609 159 4.
- Lori Siebert & Lisa Ballard, *Making a good layout*, North Light Books, Cincinnati, 1992, ISBN 0 89134 423 3.
- John Bowers, *Introduction to two-dimensional design: Understanding form and function*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1999, ISBN 0 471 29224 9.
- Bryan L Peterson, *Using design basics to get creative results*, North Light Books, Cincinnati, 1996, ISBN 0 89134 651 1.
- Alistair Campbell, *The designer's lexicon: The essential illustrated dictionary of design, print, and computer terms*, Cassell & Co., London, 2000, ISBN 0 940087 20 0.
- Roger C Parker, *Looking good in print*, 4th edn, Coriolis, Scottsdale, Arizona, 1998, ISBN 1 56604 8956 7.
- Marcelle Lapow Toor, *Graphic design on the desktop: A guide for the non-designer*, 2nd edn, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1998, ISBN 0 471 29307 5.



DOING IT SMARTER

Dummy text

For rough layouts, use actual headings and possibly the first words in an opening paragraph, but replace the real text with 'dummy' text. Dummy text is just gobbledegook that looks like text, but it encourages clients to consider the design effect of the type without being distracted by the content. Your client or boss will then focus on the design and not the minutiae of spelling and proofreading detail.

'All visual form is made up of three categories of components: elements, characteristics and interactions. Visual elements are dots, lines, planes and volumes, and each element possesses characteristics of size, shape, texture and color. These elements and characteristics are directed by principles of visual interaction, which are position, direction and space.'

John Bowers in *Introduction to Two-Dimensional Design: Understanding Form and Function*



Unity is achieved in this catalogue through repetition in the text block shape of curves taken from the images. Client: Australian Exhibitions Touring Agency Publication: *Contemporary Silversmithing: Connections across National Boundaries* Designer: Maureen MacKenzie-Taylor Studio: Msquared Research Assisted Design

Unity

What is 'unity' in graphic design terms? Unity is in the details. It is relationships that drive decision making. For example, when choosing rules to place between lines of text or to surround photographs, there is a good technique that subtly brings unity to a design. If you choose the stroke thickness of the crossbar of a capital A in the typeface that appears closest to the rules, it means your underlines or photo borders relate to the typeface they are seen with, bringing a 'unity' to those elements. Consistency in captioning style, heading style and text placement in relation to images all help to create a harmonious layout.

Unity is in type selection. You can save time by using a few typefaces consistently – and, by doing so, also achieve unity. They look like they belong together because you set up the expectation that they will recur. In multipage layouts in brochures and feature articles, this type consistency means establishing the fonts throughout the piece, not just using them once. The title face may come back in pull-quotes or drop capitals or photo captions, but it doesn't have to come back in the same weight. It might just come back in the italic version or the bold version or small capitals.

Unity is in image-editing. Crop photographs in a range of similar sizes (say, only three: a square, a vertical rectangle and a horizontal rectangle) so there is a visual rhythm created in the layout or the whole publication that also reinforces that the photographs belong. There might be a photographic attitude too: photojournalism, studio set-ups, detail photography – these styles might create sets of images that imply a consistent image selection and editing approach.

Unity is in space. 'White' space can have a unifying effect on disparate elements. Of course, space does not need to be white – it can be any area of colour that doesn't have a pattern, image or text in it. Similarity in the way you choose to structure space into your layouts can bring unity to a multipage project. Do you normally put space around the edges or just at the bottom of the layout?

Unity is in colour selection. There can be a colour 'attitude' to a piece, where you try to achieve a colour balance between the images and the text. In book covers and posters where there is a colour photograph, it is often a

unifying decision to select colours for the type, background, border and any symbols or single-colour graphics that come from somewhere in the image, thereby unifying image and type. Subliminally, we feel the text and layout elements belong with the photograph. In photo selection, discard photographs that do not have a similar colour palette to your main photograph and instead use photographs that complement its colours.

Unity is in proximity or alignment. When you align elements of a layout, the grouping that results may operate as a single entity. So the positioning of four square-cut photographs, in an aligned stack of two on two, creates a larger square within the layout. Even with a group of different sized and shaped elements, close proximity can generate a 'group shape' that may become the foreground element in your layout. Viewers will find connections and assume connections when objects are aligned, juxtaposed or positioned in close proximity.

While it does not have to be too rigid, remember there are benefits to unity. In magazines, the benefit is that you can find the articles between the advertisements. In feature articles or an ad campaign, the identification of like characteristics signals the continuation of the story. In a website, similarity of navigation elements and content presentation enables users to move about easily. In corporate identity programs, the similarities signal a unified organisation and enable you to rely on a level of branding that means you are jumping off with the new story – a whole slew of information is already known about the organisation and doesn't need repeating.

Graphic detailing

A visual logic system can operate in a design that makes it an 'entity'. This logic system involves consistent application of styling and appropriate decision making on text and image hierarchies and font selection, but also an individualising – and unifying – component that could be termed 'graphic detailing'.

You will need to create a unified design entity for each client and often for each project. If your project is a website, a publication, an advertisement, a corporate identity or a film title, creating a unique visual system will help it achieve a stand-out quality, and make it harder for your competitors to duplicate. It is creating a 'house style'

CHECKLIST

Design dynamics

To vary your layouts:

- Balance:
 - symmetry/centring
 - asymmetry
- Line (and implied line)
- Shape (including the shape of text)
- Colour and tone (dark/light values)
- Scale (relative size of elements)
- Contrast (big/small, dark/light)
- Texture, pattern and repetition
- Unity and alignment
- Space

In *Using Design Basics to Get Creative Results*, Bryan L Peterson discusses design dynamics in this set:

- Format
- Elements:
 - line
 - type
 - shape
 - texture
- Structure:
 - balance
 - contrast
 - unity
 - value (tone)
 - colour.

DOING IT FASTER

Dingbats

If you want a circle, equilateral triangle or square, consider using the Zapf Dingbats font instead of the drawing tools in your program. Because they operate as a font, you must be sure you have removed general font variations such as baseline shift, italicising or horizontal scaling because they will affect the draw of the character. (*Hint:* You can use horizontal scaling to create an oval out of a circle dingbat, an acute-angled isosceles triangle out of an equilateral triangle dingbat, and a rectangle out of a square dingbat. You can then italicise them for fun – and even rotate the text block.)

In many cases, it is faster to resize a typeface than to redraw, enlarge or reduce a redrawn element. You can alter the position of dingbats minutely because they operate as a font, so alignment can be fine-tuned using leading, baseline shift, tracking and kerning controls.



A letterform might be used as the basis for a layout

for layout and design decision making that reflects the uniqueness of that project.

Graphic detailing entails using visual references to unique characteristics of your project. It also involves subtle repetition of those references. It is seeing a chance for individualisation in the smallest details or seemingly most mundane aspects of a design. It saves time because you do not need to create new graphic devices to enliven your layout; simply use the ones you already have. But more importantly, it gives an inner strength to your layout because of the resonances that subtle reiteration can have.

You will be surprised how effective this technique can be. It is often a design ingredient that you don't actually notice until it's pointed out, but you respond to the design and wonder why some designs don't work as 'logically'.

Finding the 'unique' characteristics of the job can be as simple as looking at the letters in the title. If you choose one of the more interesting letterforms in the title and then convert your chosen letterform to paths in your illustration package, select maybe just a curve or angle from the top or bottom of the character. Depending on how you then scale that feature and where you place it in the layout, it might give you a path to which you can snap a title or headline. It could give you a unique shape with which you could crop a photograph. It could become a curved or angled margin that your column of text could contour down. It could become the dividing line between two fields of colour in the background. You could step and repeat it, and then colour between each, to create a pattern of coloured stripes down your page. All of these possibilities can arise simply from a feature of a letterform from the title!

The fact that a tiny detail like this can provide a rich variety of graphic options means you do not need to create new graphic devices. Simply recognise and use the ones you've already chosen.

Within images, too, there are details that can be recropped and featured elsewhere or used for backgrounds. They might be ghosted to provide a pale but related background for the layout. They might be repeated and distorted into a pattern or texture. You might use the negative version. There are colours that can be duplicated for display text. There are infinite possibilities.

But let's assume you decided that all the photographs in your report would be cropped into squares. The square

becomes a graphic device within that layout as a result of that decision. So reiterate it. How? Use squares instead of bullets in dot-point lists. You could also put all pull-quotes or chapter headings into a square. Your folios could be contained in a fine ruled square placed equidistant from the top and outer trim, creating an even more subtle square of blank space. In bar charts, the bars could be a stack of squares instead of a rectangle. Your colour codings would have square samples of colour in the key. You could justify your text and fill square text blocks. In a sans serif title, you could customise the letter *i* by replacing its circular dot with a little square. Okay, these really are the details – but they have resonance.

Part of effective corporate identity design involves this type of detailing, using pieces of your existing corporate symbols, logos and colour palette. Maybe you can use stripes that mimic a diagonal line in your symbol to fill borders and strips of colour in the backgrounds of brochure covers and other corporate paraphernalia. In a series of report covers, you could use enlargements of details taken from the symbol to create the base layout.

It can be as simple as a slight colour variation in the background that subtly reinforces the symbol. This reinforcing is the layout secret. If you then incorporate a band of, for example, diagonal stripes that reinforce the diagonal from the symbol, you are creating a design ground that is 'exclusive'; to your organisation. Another client could use those same graphic devices (diagonals and subtle details) because they are not, of themselves, exclusive. But their use elsewhere will not have the same resonance that they will have if you use them. Worse still, if accidentally used by a competitor, their material may be perceived as emanating from your organisation.

Balance

Balance is achieved when the elements in a layout are comfortably related to one another and the different weight of the elements has been distributed evenly across the area of the page. Imagine an adult and a child on a seesaw. For balance to be achieved, you must place the adult and the child carefully at different distances from the fulcrum.

An element's size, shape, colour and tone determine weight in a layout.



BEFORE

detail

AFTER

detail

Subtle refinements like a dot on the *i* can reiterate a chosen theme: in this case, the use of squares. Also note the altered alignment.

DOING IT SMARTER

Edge detail

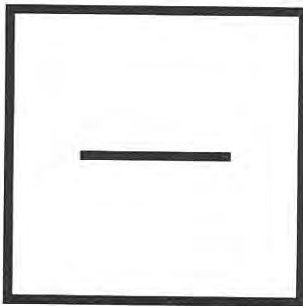
Fine trimming and registration slows the job on press and finishing processes – avoid complexity and detail on the trim edges of your designs. Avoid lines, rules or borders that run parallel and very close to the trim edges, because if the trim is slightly out, the parallels will look wrong.

A symmetrical layout will always be balanced unless you add a rogue element. In asymmetrical layouts, balance is much more complicated and you use other dynamics to achieve it.

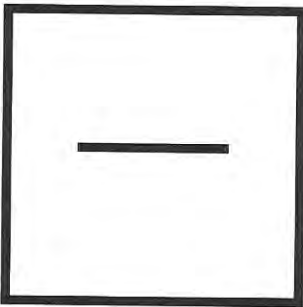
To simplify some of the complexities, you can select a group of elements (often title, author and a small illustration or symbol) and centre them off-centre. That is, you can centre them to balance their relationships but then place their centre line anywhere on the layout – often to the right of a full-page illustration balancing a character or object on the left.

Symmetry

Designed around a central axis, symmetry will always balance, but it can be too predictable. For ‘predictable’, read ‘boring’. This traditional Western design style always creates a balanced design because the elements are reflected around a central axis, meaning the ‘weight’ of each element is evenly balanced on either side of the centre line. The symmetrical layout is static. It will always look neat – and is a good default design if you’re running short of time – but is just a bit boring or bland. This is the result of the main structural interest being a downward centre line.



Physical centre



Optical centre

Vertical centring

Try to remember to lift the elements to ‘optical centre’ – which is slightly above physical centre. This is achieved easily by putting a larger margin measurement at the bottom of the layout than at the top. It avoids the feeling that the text block or print area might have ‘slipped’ down the page. This is also the reason that title pages normally have the title placed in the top half of the page.

Asymmetry

Asymmetry is inspired by Eastern design traditions. Asymmetrical layouts are much more involving for the viewer than symmetrical ones. The response to an asymmetrical design is a physiological response as well as an aesthetic one. Asymmetrical designs are interesting designs for your eyes. Your eye responds by travelling to and fro across the layout. This eye movement is a physical involvement and is part of our perception of increased dynamism within these layouts.

For balance within asymmetrical arrangement, the Japanese have developed a modular approach to layout in architecture with their arrangement of *tatami* mats, which is also used in screens for room division. The *tatami* mat is a rectangle created from two squares. In combination, *tatami* mats will create balanced patterns that are not necessarily symmetrical.

Asymmetry fascinated Piet Mondrian (among others) in the early 20th century. Using the methods explored by Mondrian can create a strong interrelated layout.

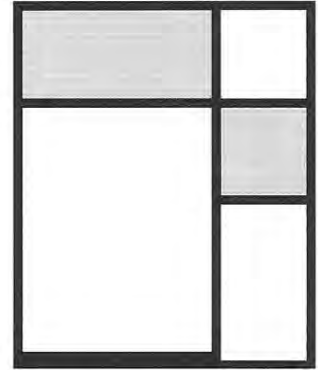
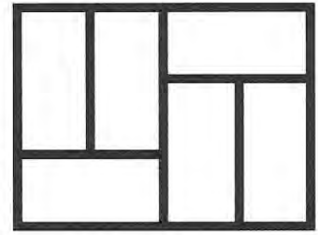
Balance is complicated in asymmetrical layouts because the relationships between the elements are dynamic. There is ‘tension and movement’ created by positioning. For example, a large black-and-white photograph at the top left of a page might be balanced by a small red logo at the bottom right of the page. The weight distribution here is not only to do with size but also to do with the comparative ‘weight’ of the elements’ attraction value – the red has stronger attraction value and is therefore ‘heavier’ than its size alone indicates.

Freestyle layout

‘Organic’ or ‘free-form’ layout is mostly used on posters, packaging and advertisements. Often you’ll sketch a layout and keep sketching until you can see the completed design in the scribbles you have made. Then, sitting at the keyboard with trusty mouse or graphics tablet with stylus at the ready, you convert the scribbles into your final piece. This is the ideal working method – establish what you want each element of the design to achieve and then translate that, massaging text and image to fit your idea. Details, of course, are not worked out so much in the sketching phase.

Free-form design might answer a particular project more effectively than the often rigid grid structure that many designers adopt. For brochures, pamphlets, handbills, packaging, stationery, covers and posters, consider using freestyle or free-form design.

With freestyle, you can size and place images and text according to their level of importance and their image quality, and interrelate them by juxtaposition or layering. Remember that the viewer or audience will need to get some information from your design, so don’t disguise the information or hide it. Help the viewer to understand.



Piet Mondrian’s work with areas of flat colour (*above*) demonstrates clear techniques for creating balanced layouts (*below*).





A small element can dominate or balance a larger element in asymmetrical layout.

DOING IT SMARTER

Layout practice

Using a group of elements such as a picture, some text and a heading, create a series of designs that explore the interrelationships of those elements. Create a layout that is image-dominant where the image is probably larger. Can you make an image-dominant layout where the image is smaller? Try a text-dominant layout as well. These are often difficult, but a hint is to keep the image minute and the headline huge and use interesting type selection.

Try varying the text size (a larger size will fill more page area) and varying the number of columns, and their width. Columns on the same page do not have to be the same width. Also try to make the text and image each have exactly the same area in the layout.

You could try a space-dominant layout where your elements float in space. Then try to give a particular character to the layout: jolly, traditional, sophisticated, modern, lively, restrained, even boring! (If you can make a design intentionally boring, presumably you can avoid it later!)

Having the maximum flexibility that free-form offers allows you to place pictures directly where the text refers to them. You also have the ultimate inflexibility for text massaging. You can vary line lengths and leading according to what is most readable for your chosen typefaces, without the limiting structures of modules or grid-based column widths. Pictures, too, can be whatever size is most logical or interesting for the image without having to conform to column widths or modules. Free-form implies an asymmetrical layout.

In most designs, there are places where small changes could be made to improve the accurate retrieval of information. With free-form design, there is the flexibility to do some fine-tuning of type and image sizing and placement, all the while maintaining an interesting design that follows the logical flow of information, rather than a pre-ordained presentation system like a grid.

There are drawbacks to free-form design. It is so flexible that some people find it hard to start. And you don't want to make decisions that allow yourself or others to procrastinate any longer. That flexibility can also make it hard to stop (there is always a little more tweaking you could do). Unfortunately, computers encourage this, regardless of the layout style you choose.

In order to use this technique successfully, you need to have decision and experimentation time – and sometimes that is just too hard to find.

Free-form layout can work in publication design but is rarely used. Grids are faster for production of multipage documents and usually make it easier to control the layout for consistency and general flow through the document. Magazines, however, sometimes use free-form layout in a feature section.

Grids

To bind elements within a layout and to achieve a visual consistency over a series of layouts, designers often use a grid. A grid is an invisible structure that underlies a layout. Elements such as pictures, text, headings and logos are positioned in the layout in relation to the grid. Nearly all publications, and many advertisements, use a grid.

There are sound financial reasons for using a grid scheme too, because a grid simplifies a number of decisions